

The Twelve Spies in Canaan

Numbers 13–14

Characters: 2 Readers, Moses, Joshua (a spy), Caleb (a spy), 10 more Spies, 1–6 Sign Holders, Land Makers (optional), Israelites (Land Makers when the Spies come back), Leader (you)

Costumes: Sunglasses for spies, costume item for Moses (optional)

Props: Grape Cluster (CD), 14 Son/Tribe Signs (CD), Mission Sign (CD), 5 Flip Signs (CD), Tree Sign (CD)

Dowel, 4 feet or longer to carry grapes; 2 or more blue crepe-paper streamers, 12 feet or longer (optional); 2 or more small balls, red for pomegranates and purple for figs (or other colors); chair for Moses; highlighter markers

Prepare: Print Leader Notes, Leader Script, and Review Questions. Highlight your parts, including preparation in the Leader Notes. Print 5 Reader Scripts for Moses, 2 Readers, Joshua, and Caleb.

Gather supplies. Print the Grape Cluster, 7 pages of Son/Tribe Signs, Mission Sign, 5 Flip Signs, and Tree Sign.

Enlarge the Grape Cluster, if you can. Cut it out and tape it in the horizontal middle of the 4-foot dowel.

Cut the Son/Tribe Sign pages in half. Affix each sign to poster board or heavy construction paper for stability and attach a paint stick, ruler, or dowel. Keep all signs to use in Lesson 2. Other lessons use some signs as well.

Fold the Flip Signs in half so the words show on the outside. Sign holders will flip from one word to the other as Readers say these words.

Cut crepe-paper streamers. Keep them to use again in Lesson 2.

Decide how you will use your space. Leave a large space open as the Promised Land (Land Makers) that Spies explore. Set the chair for Moses on one end of your space and plan to seat children there to start.

Leader Notes

Let all children participate in this drama activity; it is not a performance. Include preparation time as part of the activity so that everyone sees and hears the plans. Encourage children to relax and enjoy participating.

As Leader, you introduce and direct the activity. You use review questions after the skit to help students understand the lesson.

If time allows, repeat the activity with students playing the same or new parts. Students often relax and enjoy doing the activity again. Children, especially those with language-processing delays, learn a lot from repeating activities.

There are many parts in this skit, and children may play more than one part. For example, a Sign Holder could also be a Land Maker and an Israelite.

If you have fewer children, use fewer Spies, Sign Holders, and Land Makers. Everyone becomes Israelites when the Spies come back with their report.

Choose people as Moses and Readers. Give them Reader Scripts and highlighters. Ask them to read through their parts and mark them with highlighters. Ask Readers to read slowly and with emotion. Give Moses his costume item (optional).

Choose people to play Caleb, Joshua, and 10 Spies. Give sunglasses to them.

Keep the Joseph, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Levi Signs, but give the other 10 Son/Tribe Signs to Moses, who hands them out during the skit.

Choose other Sign Holders. Give out 5 Flip Signs and show how to flip them from one word to the other. Hand out the Mission and Tree Signs too. Tell Sign Holders to listen carefully to show the words on their signs, but tell them you will help by pointing at them when it's time to show and flip their signs.

If you use Land Makers, gather the children together. Tell them they become parts of the land for the spies to explore. Ask them to use their imaginations to become mountains, trees, streams, and walled cities. Show an example by asking everyone to stand in a circle and hold hands to show a walled city. Ask how one person could make a walled city. Let students practice for a bit.

Encourage students to make trees by extending arms as branches. Make mountains by touching hands of friends standing in a row with arms above their shoulders. Crouch down to make rocks. If you like, give blue crepe-paper streamers to students to make water.

Ask Land Makers to decide what they want to be, but say they will not take their places until just before Moses sends out the Spies. Before that, and after the Spies come home, all Land Makers act as Israelites.

Give the balls (pomegranates and figs) and grape cluster (attached to the dowel) to the Land Makers. Tell them to hide them when they make the land.

Leader Script

The Twelve Spies in Canaan, Numbers 13–14

Gather everyone and ask them to sit in front of you.

LEADER: Let's talk about the twelve tribes of Israel.

Israel, also known as Jacob, was the father of twelve sons, and he blessed his sons before he died. He also blessed the two sons of Joseph, but no other grandsons. (Show Joseph Sign.) This divided the tribe of Joseph into two tribes: Manasseh and Ephraim.

(Show Manasseh and Ephraim Signs and then give the Ephraim Sign to JOSHUA. Hang on to the Manasseh Sign. Set aside the Joseph Sign.)

This made thirteen tribes, but in the wilderness, God set aside the tribe of Levi (show Levi Sign) as priests and temple workers.

Later, when the children of Israel came into the Promised Land, God told Joshua not to give the Levites a portion of land like the other tribes. Instead, the Levites received cities within each tribe. The Levite priests lived among the other tribes to remind them of the Lord and His love for His people.

Technically, the Levites were no longer numbered among the twelve tribes. We'll see that in our skit today. (Set aside the Levi Sign.)

Ask SIGN HOLDER to show the Mission Sign.

READER 1: After the children of Israel left slavery in Egypt, it took two years to reach the land God had promised to give them: Canaan.

READER 2: Moses led the people to camp in the wilderness of Paran.

READER 1: There, the Lord told Moses to choose twelve men to spy on the land of Canaan, one from each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Give Manasseh Sign to one of the 10 SPIES. MOSES gives the Judah Sign to CALEB; then he gives signs to the other 9 SPIES: Reuben, Simeon, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin.

Ask 12 SPIES to say their tribe names and count off.

LEADER: Moses did not pick a spy from the priests and temple workers of Levi. Manasseh and Ephraim represented Joseph.

READER 2: There were many things Moses wanted the spies to find out about in their mission to explore the land God promised to His people.

MOSES: Go into the land from north to south and east to west. Go into the Negeb and the hill country. *(Pause for SIGN HOLDERS to show and flip signs.)*

Are the people strong *(point at Strong/Weak SIGN HOLDER to show Strong)* or weak? *(SIGN HOLDER flips sign to Weak.)*

Are there many people *(point at Many/Few SIGN HOLDER to show Many)* or just a few? *(SIGN HOLDER flips sign to Few.)*

Is it good land *(point at Good Land/Bad Land SIGN HOLDER to show Good Land)* or bad land? *(SIGN HOLDER flips sign to Bad Land.)*

Do people live in camps *(point at Camps/Strongholds SIGN HOLDER to show Camps)* or strongholds with walled cities? *(Sign Holder flips sign to Strongholds.)*

(Point at Rich Land/Poor Land SIGN HOLDER to show Rich Land.) Is it rich land *(SIGN HOLDER flips sign to Poor Land)* or poor land?

(Point at Trees SIGN HOLDER to show sign.) Does it have trees? You know, after wandering in the desert for two years, it would be wonderful to have trees!

(To SPIES) Be courageous, but don't get caught by the people living in the land. And please bring back some fruit of the land. It's time for the first grapes to be ripe!

READER 2: Moses really wanted to taste some fruit after eating quail and manna for two years!

Tell SIGN HOLDERS to set down all signs, and then tell LAND MAKERS to go and make their parts of the land across the open area. Then inspect and prompt different actions, if needed.

READER 1: The twelve spies left to investigate Canaan.

Tell SPIES to go check out the land and look for fruit to bring back. Let SPIES continue for a minute, but bring them back before energy wanes. If you have a lot of land to investigate, let SPIES continue longer.

READER 2: *(As the SPIES work)* The spies went through the wilderness of Zin and the Negeb in the south. They even went hundreds of miles north, as far north as Hebron. In the Valley of Eshcol, they cut down a single cluster of grapes so large that they had to carry it on a pole between two of them.

If needed, prompt 2 SPIES to carry grapes on a pole. Before calling SPIES back, make sure they found all the pomegranates and figs.

Call SPIES and LAND MAKERS to come back. Tell LAND MAKERS they are ISRAELITES now, ready to hear the spy report. Tell ISRAELITES to sit. Ask SIGN HOLDERS with flip signs to stand with SPIES, listen carefully, and show one side of their signs.

MOSES: *(Stands and goes to each SPY to shake hands and welcome the group home; then sits) You were gone forty days! Gather, Israelites! Let's hear the spies' report about the land God promised to give us.*

Tell SPIES to get ready to show the fruit they found.

MOSES: So, the land, is it rich or poor?

READER 1: The land flows with milk and honey. It's very rich! *(Point at Rich Land/Poor Land SIGN HOLDER to show Rich Land side.)*

READER 2: Then the spies showed the fruit to Moses and the people. They had grapes, pomegranates, and figs.

MOSES: So is the land good or bad?

READER 1: The land is good! *(Point at Good Land/Bad Land SIGN HOLDER to show Good Land side.)*

MOSES: Tell us about the people. Are they weak or strong?

READER 2: The people in the land are strong! *(Point at Strong/Weak SIGN HOLDER to show Strong side.)*

MOSES: Where do they live?

READER 1: They live in fortified cities. *(Point at Camps/Strongholds SIGN HOLDER to show Strongholds side.)*

MOSES: Are there just a few of these people or many?

READER 2: Many different tribes and groups live there. *(Point at Many/Few SIGN HOLDER to show Many side.)*

READER 1: And there are giants from Nephilim!

READER 2: We felt like grasshoppers to them.

MOSES: And the Israelites felt very, very afraid!

Ask ISRAELITES to show great fear.

MOSES: But Caleb and Joshua did not feel afraid.

CALEB: We can take the land! The Lord God is with us and will help us overcome the people living there.

JOSHUA: The Lord God is great! He brought us this far. He'll be with us as we go forward.

MOSES: But the other spies disagreed.

LEADER: (*Ask 10 SPIES to raise their fists and say:*) **"They're too strong!"**

READER 1: The Israelites shouted and cried. They grumbled against Moses and his brother Aaron.

READER 2: They wanted to go back to Egypt.

LEADER: (*Ask ISRAELITES to repeat phrases*) **"Why did the Lord / bring us this far / to let us die here? / Let's choose a leader / to take us back to Egypt."**

READER 1: Moses fell on his face in shame for his people. (*MOSES lies facedown.*) Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes to show their sadness that the people would not trust God. (*JOSHUA and CALEB pretend to tear their clothing at the neckline.*)

JOSHUA: The land is exceedingly good land.

CALEB: If the Lord delights in us, He will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey.

JOSHUA AND CALEB: Do not rebel against the Lord!

JOSHUA: And do not fear the people of the land.

CALEB: They will be easy pickings for us.

JOSHUA AND CALEB: God will not protect them. The Lord is with us!

READER 2: But the people wept all night and did not trust the Lord.

READER 1: And God became angry.

READER 2: The Lord said to Moses, "How long will these people despise Me?"

READER 1: The Lord said, "How long will they not believe in Me, despite the miracles I did for them in Egypt and in the wilderness?"

READER 2: The Lord said, "I will strike them with disease and disinherit them. I will make you, Moses, a greater and mightier nation than they!"

READER 1: But Moses spoke to the Lord for the people.

MOSES: Lord, if You do this, the Egyptians and other nations will hear about it and say that You didn't keep Your promise to give Your people this land. Please let Your power be great as You promised. For You are slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. You forgive iniquity and transgression. Please pardon the iniquity of Your people, according to the greatness of Your steadfast love, just as You have forgiven them from Egypt until now.

READER 2: So the Lord forgave them.

READER 1: But the Lord promised that adults who lived in Egypt and saw His great works would never enter the Promised Land.

READER 2: They would die in the wilderness, and their children, those twenty years old or younger, would inherit the land.

READER 1: And the ten spies who did not trust in the Lord all died from a plague.

Tell 10 SPIES to fall to the ground.

READER 2: And after wandering for thirty-eight more years, Caleb, Joshua, and the children of the Israelites entered the Promised Land.

Review Questions

Understand the Bible account and make life applications

The Twelve Spies in Canaan, Numbers 13–14

Ask questions to check children's understanding of the skit and Bible account.

What was your favorite part of the skit? Let students share.

What did you learn from doing the part(s) you did? Let students share.

Why didn't the people trust the Lord to give them the land? They felt afraid of the strong people, strong cities, and giants. They didn't trust the Lord to help them. They probably feared dying. They wanted to go back to the security of what they knew in Egypt rather than go into the risky unknown country. Ultimately, the people sinned when they did not trust the Lord.

What did God do for the people that should have made them know they could trust Him? Help students recall information from previous Bible lessons they may have studied. If they cannot recall, tell them that God sent ten horrific plagues on Egypt to show He is the true God and the Egyptian gods were powerless idols. He saved them from the Egyptian army by taking them through the Red Sea on dry ground. He provided food and water every day in the desert: manna in the morning and quail at night. He gave them His Law on Mount Sinai, protected them, defeated enemies in their battles, and guided them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He gave them a tabernacle in which He Himself dwelt.

What did God do when the people refused to trust Him and go into the land? He became angry and told Moses He would kill them all and create an even better nation from Moses' family. When Moses interceded and asked God to forgive the people, He did. But they had consequences for their lack of faith. He would not allow anyone twenty years or older to go into the Promised Land. They would wander in the wilderness until all the adults died; then God would bring their children into the Promised Land.

Where do we hear God's love and grace in this Bible lesson? In love and mercy, God forgave the people for their sin of unbelief. He continued to care for them in the wilderness, providing food, water, and protection. God loves and cares for us even though we sin too. He loved us so much that He sent His own Son to earth to be born from these Israelites, to live a perfect life, suffer and die on the cross for our sins, and rise from the dead. In Christ Jesus, God gives those who believe in Him redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7).

Reader Script

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LEADER explains 12 tribes.

SIGN HOLDER shows the Mission Sign.

READER 1: After the children of Israel left slavery in Egypt, it took two years to reach the land God had promised to give them: Canaan.

READER 2: Moses led the people to camp in the wilderness of Paran.

READER 1: There, the Lord told Moses to choose twelve men to spy on the land of Canaan, one from each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Pause for LEADER and MOSES to hand out signs and LEADER directions.

READER 2: There were many things Moses wanted the spies to find out about in their mission to explore the land God promised His people.

MOSES: Go into the land from north to south and east to west. Go into the Negeb and the hill country. *(Pause for SIGN HOLDERS to show and flip signs.)*

Are the people strong *(SIGN HOLDER shows Strong)* **or weak?** *(SIGN HOLDER flips to Weak.)*

Are there many people *(SIGN HOLDER shows Many)* **or just a few?** *(SIGN HOLDER flips to Few.)*

Is it good land *(SIGN HOLDER shows Good Land)* **or bad land?** *(SIGN HOLDER flips to Bad Land.)*

Do people live in camps *(SIGN HOLDER shows Camps)* **or strongholds with walled cities?** *(SIGN HOLDER shows Strongholds.)*

Is it rich land *(SIGN HOLDER shows Rich Land)* **or poor land?** *(SIGN HOLDER flips to Poor Land.)*

(SIGN HOLDER shows Tree Sign.) **Does it have trees? You know, after wandering in the desert for two years, it would be wonderful to have trees!**

(To SPIES) **Be courageous, but don't get caught by the people living in the land. And please bring back some fruit of the land. It's time for the first grapes to be ripe!**

READER 2: Moses really wanted to taste some fruit after eating quail and manna for two years!

Pause for LEADER directions to LAND MAKERS.

READER 1: The twelve spies left to investigate Canaan.

LEADER directs SPIES' work.

READER 2: (As the SPIES work) The spies went through the wilderness of Zin and the Negeb in the south. They even went hundreds of miles north, as far north as Hebron. In the Valley of Eshcol, they cut down a single cluster of grapes so large that they had to carry it on a pole between two of them.

LEADER directs SPIES' work and then calls SPIES and LAND MAKERS to come back. Pause for more LEADER directions.

MOSES: (Stands and goes to each SPY to shake hands and welcome the group home; then sits) You were gone forty days! Gather, Israelites! Let's hear the spies' report about the land God promised to give us.

Pause for LEADER directions.

MOSES: So, the land, is it rich or poor?

READER 1: The land flows with milk and honey. It's very rich! (SIGN HOLDER shows Rich Land side.)

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READER 1: And there are giants from Nephilim!

READER 2: We felt like grasshoppers to them.

MOSES: And the Israelites felt very, very afraid!

Pause for LEADER directions.

MOSES: But Caleb and Joshua did not feel afraid.

CALEB: We can take the land! The Lord God is with us and will help us overcome the people living there.

JOSHUA: The Lord God is great! He brought us this far. He'll be with us as we go forward.

MOSES: But the other spies disagreed.

LEADER: *(Asks 10 SPIES to raise their fists and say)* "They're too strong!"

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READER 1: And the ten spies who did not trust in the Lord all died from a plague. (*LEADER tells 10 SPIES to fall to the ground.*)

READER 2: And after wandering for forty years, Caleb, Joshua, and the children of the Israelites entered the Promised Land.